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94th INFANTRY DIVISION

FEBRUARY 1945

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4. Direct the CAC historical program.
5. Supervise the Fort Leavenworth museum.

P651: BATTLEFIELD ANALYSIS

THE SAAR RIVER CROSSING
94TH INFANTRY DIVISION
FEBRUARY 1945

BY STAFF GROUP: 22D

LEIUTENANT COLONEL BEHZAT BILGIC (TURKEY)

MAJOR FELIX BANIS

MAJOR JAMES CRAWFORD

MAJOR THOMAS ELLIS

MAJOR STANLEY EVANS

MAJOR CHARLES JURGENSEN

MAJOR (P) WILLIAM LARSON

MAJOR BOBBY LUMHO

MAJOR ROBERT MANNINO

MAJOR MICHAEL MAPLES

MAJOR PHILLIP RAYMOND

MAJOR (P) BURT VANDERCLUTE

MAJOR THOMAS WILSON

CAPTAIN ROBERT MILLER

CAPTAIN MAMA TRAORE (MALI)

FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS
1984

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I. THE SUBJECT: The Saar River Crossing, February, 1945.

A. The Battle.

(1) At 0630 hours, 22 February 1945, the 301st and 302nd Infantry Regiments of the 94th Infantry Division conducted a hasty river crossing across the Saar River between Taben and Stadt under the cover of smoke. By 24 February 1945, both regiments had crossed and secured a bridgehead one and a half miles deep, allowing for the rapid crossing of tanks, tank destroyers, and motor vehicles over a single treadway bridge in the vicinity of Taben. With the crossing, the XX (US) Corps was assured the capture of Trier, a key communications center in Western Germany. *This document provides a tactical analysis of the events surrounding the crossing of the Saar River.*

(2) The surprise crossing of the Saar River followed immediately after the reduction of the Saar-Moselle Triangle. The Triangle is an area formed from an apex at the meeting of the Saar (east) and the Moselle (west) Rivers in the north to a base along an east-west line roughly coterminous with the southern border of Luxembourg. Measuring some sixteen and a half miles on each side, the triangle extended not quite thirteen miles at the base. Although the West Wall (The Siegfried Line) in this sector lay east beyond the Saar, in 1939 to 1940, the Germans had constructed a supplementary fortified line across the base of the triangle from Nenning in the west to Orscholz, which lies at a great northwestern loop in the Saar. Assuming the neutrality of Luxembourg, this line, known as the Orscholz Switch to the Germans and the Siegfried Switch to the Americans, was designed both to protect Trier and the Moselle corridor to the Rhine River and to prevent outflanking of the strongest portion of the West Wall. (1)

(3) In January 1945, the Saar-Moselle Triangle constituted an uncleared sector within General George C. Patton's Third Army operational zone. It remained uncleared due to the December 1944 call to move Third Army forces into the Ardennes Breach created by the German surprise offensive. General Walton H. Walker's XX Corps on the left wing of the Third Army had managed to turn only a scant force against the Orscholz Switch and the Triangle in November and December, achieving a minor penetration on the left portion of the Switch at Tettingen and Butzdorf, only to relinquish it to the German offensive in late December. The task of clearing the switch was assigned to Major General Harry J. Maloney's inexperienced 94th Infantry Division upon its arrival in sector in January 1945.

(4) The XX Corps participants in the battle for the Saar-Moselle Triangle and the Saar River crossing included the 94th Infantry Division and the 10th Armored

Division (commanded by Major General William H. Morris, Jr.). The Third Cavalry Group defended the Corps' center, approximately nine miles along the Saar to the confluence of the Saar and the Nied, while the 95th Infantry Division held the remainder of the corps front, to include defending a bridgehead over the Saar at Saarlautern. Opposing the U.S. XX Corps were the German 416th Infantry Division, the Panzer Grenadier Division, and the 256th Volks-Grenadier Division.(2) During the battle for the Triangle, the Germans also hastily threw in elements of the 11th Panzer Division and, after the crossing, the 2nd and 6th Mountain Division.(3)

2. Ibid, p.117-120.

3. The XX Corps, p.265-275.

B. Historical Research.

1. The overall resources for conducting a detailed analysis into the Saar River crossing are limited. All the primary documents are available in the Combined Arms Research Library (CARL) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, while the secondary holdings are at the Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. All of the secondary holdings were made available by inter-library loans through the Combined Arms Research Library.

2. The research holdings are as follows:

(a) Primary

After-Action Report, 94th Infantry Division,
1 Jan - 9 May 1945.

Byrnes, Lt. Laurence G. (editor). History of the 94th Infantry Division in World War II. Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948.

The Capture of the Saar-Moselle Triangle and Iser: 15 December 1944 - 12 March 1945. XX Corps.

MacDonald, Charles B. The Last Offensive. Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1972.

MacDonald, Charles B. The Mighty Endeavor: American Forces in the European Theater in World War II. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

The XX Corps: Its History and Service in World War II. Prepared and written by XX Corps personnel.

(b) Secondary

Esposito, BG Vincent J. (editor). The West Point Atlas of American Wars. Vol II. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959.

Gourley, James L. Cannoneers Post: The Story of the 94th Division Artillery. 1945.

301st Field Artillery Battalion at Home and Abroad. Vimperk: Steinbrenner, 1945.

The Odyssey of the 5th Field Artillery Group. Rosenheim: 1945.

5th Field Artillery Group. The Artillery Center, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Baton Rouge: Army-Navy Publishing Company, 1950.

Seek-Strike-Destroy. The Story of the 774th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Nuremburg: Zimmerman, 1945.

The History of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion from D plus 36 to V-E Day. Landshut: Kratzsch and Company, 1945.

Weigley, Russell F. Eisenhower's Lieutenants Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

Walker, Lieutenant General Walton H. "The XXth Corps' Final Campaigns." Army-Navy Journal: U.S. at War. Washington: Dec. 1945.

(c) Other: A letter requesting oral interviews with participants in the Saar River Crossing was forwarded to the 94th Infantry Division Association. To date, no reply has been received.

C. Source Evaluations.

1. The History of the 94th Infantry Division was written and published under the direction of Major General Hurray J. Maloney. In May 1945, General Maloney appointed a full time division historian, Major Samuel H. Hays, Assistant G-3, to prepare a complete and comprehensive outline for the history of the 94th Division. Major Hays was assisted by other appointed members of the Division Historical Board: Major Carl H. Schofield; Captain Frederick D. Standish II; and Technician Fourth Grade Raymond O. Kraws. These personnel drew up the original outline for the history, gathered the required source material, and compiled an exhaustive narrative of the battles for the Saar-Moselle Triangle and the Sarr River crossing itself. In July 1945, the actual writing of the manuscript was turned over to Major Paul W. Marshall, of the 319th Engineers, who, in turn, received assistance from Major John N. Smith, Captain Thomas J. McIntyre, Lieutenant George F. Shaw, Lieutenant Robert Gordon, Lieutenant Harold N. Cheatham, and Lieutenant John N. Willet. They were appointed to replace the original Historical Board members. The mass of records were studied exhaustively, and hundreds of interviews were conducted with combat personnel of the division at all levels. As redeployment or reassignment took its toll, Board members were replaced. Major Smith replaced Major Marshall as historian, who, in turn, was succeeded by Lieutenant Pierce V. Wheatly, formerly of the 301st Infantry, as the Division was inactivated in March 1946. In September 1946, Lieutenant Lawrence G. Byrnes took up the project and proceeded to rearrange and rewrite the history. Maps were prepared and numerous photographs were obtained from the official files of the U.S. Army Signal Corps. It was during Lieutenant Byrnes' tenure that the manuscript finally went to press in 1947. The book provided a well-balanced account of the events surrounding the crossing of the Saar River. It is the result of an exhaustive study of original source material and interviews and, as such, constitutes the most important data resource for the preparation of this tactical analysis of the events leading to and the actual crossing of the Saar River. This history is judged to be factual, unbiased, and entirely consistent with the paucity of information available from other sources.(4)

2. The 94th Infantry After-Action Report constitutes an official account describing the Division's activities during specified periods, in this case, the period January - March 1945. Each report was written on the first of every month and covers the previous month's activities, to include missions, tasks, and results. The Assistant G-3, 94th Division, Lieutenant Colonel R.B. Durbin, was responsible for

4. Byrnes, The History of the 94th Infantry Division, p.xiii.

this task during this timeframe. Written to cover the tactical situation, the documents chronologically depict daily events surrounding encounters with the enemy before, during, and after the Saar River crossing. Though the document contains little if any analysis, it provides an excellent source from which to adjudicate the value of Lt. Byrnes' history as well as other sources.

3. The Capture of the Saar-Moselle Triangle and Trier is an operational report of the U.S. XX Corps prepared by Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, which covers the period 15 December 1944, to 12 March 1945. This excellent document covers the XX Corps attack into the Saar-Moselle Triangle to defeat the enemy intermediate and final fortifications constituting that sector's portion of the West Wall, the hasty crossing of the Saar itself, and the rapid drive to seize the key city of Trier. The great value of the official document is that it includes key appendices which are in effect field orders and after-action-type reports covering the actions of XX Corps units associated with the 94th Infantry Division during the period in question. These serve to establish the proper perspective for the division's operations. This document is also key to the understanding of the strategic setting. Closely aligned to this report is The XX Corps: Its History and Service in World War II, prepared by Corps personnel after the war. The latter is an original document valuable for use in establishing the strategic and operational settings for the battle. It can also be used to confirm some details at the tactical level.

4. The Last Offensive by Charles B. MacDonald is chronologically the final work in the The European Theater Operations sub-series of The United States Army in World War II. Mr MacDonald is also the author of The Siegfried Line Campaign and co-author of Three Battles: Arnaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt, both of which are found in the same official series. The book describes the campaign as it gathers momentum from the Ardennes and the West Wall, and evolves into massive sweeps by huge Allied columns across the breadth of Germany after the assault of the Rhine River. Also it describes the trapping of huge German forces in the Ruhr Region, the discovery of the horror in the concentration camps, and the mad dash to the Elbe River for the juncture with the Soviet forces. This magnificent volume graphically unfolds the strategic level of operations and the role of the American Armies - First, Seventh, Ninth, and Fifteenth - which constituted the largest and most powerful force fielded by the United States. Sufficient detail on the roles of the Allied Armies and the tactical air forces is provided to put the role of the American Armies in proper perspective. The worthy contributions of such renowned war personalities as Generals of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower and Omar N. Bradley, Generals Jacob L. Devers and William H. Simpson, and several German officers, to include General Hasso Von Manteuffel, enhance the

historical and analytical value of this worthy tome.(5) It has been used extensively to establish the strategic and operational setting for this analysis. It also provides an excellent account of the battle for the Saar-Moselle Triangle at the operational level. Tactical detail on the actual crossing itself, however, is very limited and does not provide any new information.

5. The remaining resources obtained were of secondary value only, consisting predominantly of small unit-level brochures of the type used to promote esprit in newly arrived unit personnel. All were obtained from Carlisle Barracks' Military History Institute and did not contribute anything new or significant to the research effort except for some anecdotes concerning some of the participants in the battles and campaigns. Any detail concerning the Saar River crossing was minimal and was available in the previously mentioned sources.

II. THE STRATEGIC SETTING.

A. The Strategy.

1. The German Ardennes offensive of December 1944 had upset the Allied "Broadfront Strategy". This strategy envisioned an advance generally all along the front from Holland in the north to Switzerland in the south until the Rhine River was reached; from there, the main effort would surge across the Rhine in the north to seize the River Ruhr and the critical Ruhr industrial region. Throughout the course of the counteroffensive, the Supreme Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, had never wavered in his determination to eventually return to this strategy. So in late January, as the Americans were erasing the last of the bulge in the Ardennes, the 12th Army Group Commander, General Omar Bradley was very aware that the focus of the Allied effort was to shift north from his Army Group to General Bernard Montgomery's 21st Army Group. This implied relinquishing some of his own divisions to General Simpson's Ninth Army, still under Montgomery's command.

2. The release of American units to Montgomery was objectionable to Bradley. Furthermore, in his mind, there were plenty of reasons to justify his holding on to the 29 divisions comprising his First and Third Armies. Very logically, he felt that his forces should capitalize on the momentum generated by the elimination of the bulge to drive on through the Eifel, catch the Germans off-balance while they anticipated an attack from the north by the 21st Army Group, and thereby gain the Rhine in a position to cut in behind the enemy facing Montgomery.

3. Though the proposal was not incompatible with Eisenhower's own plan - for it did not matter whether the British or the Americans reached the Rhine first - the British Chiefs of Staff had indicated their disagreement with Eisenhower and insisted on a strategy review by the Combined Chiefs prior to the forthcoming Malta Conference. Their objection was based on the belief that the Allies lacked the strength for two simultaneous thrusts and the insistence that all forces should be assembled for the drive in the north.

4. Eisenhower rejected the British concept. He reiterated his plan to hold a defendable line on the Rhine before jumping the river in strength with the primary effort in the north, as previously stated, and a secondary effort south of the Ruhr to link with the main effort in the north. Eisenhower, therefore, told Bradley to drive through the Eifel with his 29 divisions. The qualification, however, was that the drive should be quick and decisive to insure the certain penetration of the West Wall Frontier Defense - that or lose some divisions and assume the supporting role.

5. Unfortunately, a quick, decisive penetration would be hard to achieve. Although the Germans were in fact moving northward in anticipation of Montgomery's attack, the cold, deep snow, and fatigue defied the possibilities for rapid success. From 28 January to 1 February, three corps attempted to penetrate the frontier defenses north and east of St. Vith within the Losheim Gap; but severe winter conditions frustrated every effort. The forces accomplished little more than to draw up to the first pillboxes of the West Wall.

6. On 1 February, Eisenhower ordered Bradley to halt and to begin transferring divisions to Simpson's Ninth Army. Moreover, Bradley's First Army, under General Jacob L. Devers, was ordered to seize the Ruhr River dams in order to protect Montgomery's right flank. In deference, Bradley was allowed to conduct limited attacks into the Eifel in an attempt to establish a line of departure for future operations. The focus of the Allied offensive was effectively shifted to the north.

7. On 8 February, Operation Veritable was launched southeastward by the First Canadian Army to seize the Wallech-Orne line. A day later, assuming the Ruhr dams were captured, General Simpson was to cross the Ruhr in Operation Grenade, then swing northeast to link on the Rhine with the Canadians. (6)

B. The Operational Plan.

1. In addition to seizing the Ruhr dams, the U.S. forces had two other missions to accomplish prior to being able to drive to the Rhine. They had to eliminate the irritating German bridgehead (thirty by fifty miles) south of Strasbourg called the Colmar Pocket. Simultaneously, they had to clear a triangle embracing some 100 square miles between the confluence of the Saar and Moselle Rivers near Trier and overcome a spur of the West Wall called the "Orscholz Sehenstellung" or the Orscholz Switch. (7)

2. True to his passion for retracing the paths of ancient conquerors whenever doing so could plausibly be combined with current strategic or tactical advantage, General George S. Patton diverted his attention to Trier and therefore the Orscholz Switch; for Trier marked the historic city of Caesar's Gallic conquests.

3. Patton disposed three corps, VIII in the north, XII in the center, and XX in the south facing the Triangle and Trier. General Walker's XXth Corps was already nibbling in the direction of Trier along its fifty kilometer front. Patton sought to turn the XII Corps' 76th Division southward so as to convert the attack on Trier and the Triangle into an envelopment. To give the attack appropriate power, he hoped to persuade SHAEF to grant him additional strength for XX Corps.

4. During November 1944, Patton had hoped to use the 83rd Division in the Orscholz Switch, but the division had been snatched away from him. Thereafter, the Switch had defied the combined efforts of Combat Command Alpha of the 10th Armored Division and the 358th Infantry of the 90th Division. Future operations hinged on wresting control of the Switch from the Germans.

5. In January, XX Corps dispositions consisted of Major General Twaddle's 95th Division and Major General Paul's 26th Division on fifteen kilometers of Walker's right flank; the Third Cavalry Group defended an equal distance in the center, and Major General Harry J. Maloney's inexperienced 94th Infantry division occupied some twenty kilometers on Walker's left flank.

6. The 94th Division, a new division with little or no combat experience, had arrived in sector on 7 January. Earlier, it had helped to contain Lorient and St. Nazaire in France. The division, appeared to be of questionable quality for several reasons. Not only was it new, but since its arrival, it had sustained the highest ratio of non combat to

7. Ibid, pp. 416-419.

combat casualties in the Third Army. In fact, it is alleged that Patton had threatened Maloney with becoming a non combat casualty himself if his unit did not soon shape up.

C. The Tactical Plan.

1. The Orscholz Switch is similar to the West Wall itself. It is a defensive position two miles deep, fronted by dragon's teeth or antitank ditches and composed of pill-boxes and concrete bunkers reinforced with field fortifications. It sits astride high ground forming a watershed for streams flowing generally northeast to the Saar River and southwest to the Moselle River. The terrain is rolling with sharp compartments and dense woods in places. Most major roads converge on Saarburb, which is situated halfway up the east side of the Triangle on the west bank of the Saar itself.

2. As the 94th Division moved into position on 7 January, the levies imposed by the Ardennes fighting had so severely reduced General Walker's XX Corps that all sectors were thinly manned. The 94th Division faced the entire 13 mile stretch of the Orscholz Switch, from the Moselle to the Saar.

3. On 12 January, Walker ordered Maloney to begin a series of battalion-size probes against the Orscholz Switch, in part to prevent the enemy (General Blaskowitz's Army Group G) from reducing his garrisons there to send reinforcements elsewhere, and partly to season the 94th Division.(8)

4. The battle for the Orscholz Switch which began with a series of probes on the 14 January was to last more than a month. The objective was to punch through the switch and reach the Saar River in such a fashion as to keep sufficient pressure on Army Group G., to force it to retain all its elements to defend the Switch. The action ended up with a breakthrough on 19 February and a two day exploitation to the Saar River by 21 February. The fight through this first portion of the West Wall cost the Germans an estimated 3000 dead and many more captured. Only in the 94th Division, where thick antipersonnel minefields were encountered on 19 February, raising the Division's casualties to over a thousand wounded, were U.S. losses severe. However, the Division not only succeeded in reaching the Saar along with the 70th Armored Division, but the Americans forced General Blaskowitz and Army Group G to concentrate additional forces against the relentless attack - forces which were critically needed for planned German offensive actions elsewhere.(9)

8. Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, pp. 589-595.

9. MacDonald, Offensive, pp. 117-129.

III. Review of the Tactical Situation

A. Study of the Area of Operations

1. Climate and Weather: To fully appreciate the climate for the Saar River crossing of 22 - 23 February 1945, one must understand the "winter" weather experienced by the 94th Infantry Division during its 4 and 1/2 months of action on the continent. From September 1944 to 1 January 1945, the 94th Inf Div had been "containing enemy forces in Brittany and protecting the south flank of the 12th Army Group along the Loire River to the Yonne River, inclusive." (1) This containment of German units near the Breton ports of Lorient and St Nazaire occurred in the cold of winter but was in a milder area and closer to the major LOC's than the division found itself in February 1945. The month of January was spent in the cold and snow of eastern France and the Alsace region of Germany. A brief, unseasonal warming in early February had produced muddy roads, soggy foxholes and a sort of never-dry, chilling environment. On the evening of 21 - 22 February 1945, the Saar Valley was thick with a fog which increased the feeling of cold and amplified the volume of noise created by anything mechanical. About noon on 22 February 1945 the fog lifted. (2) The sun shone for the rest of the day, exposing the attacking 301st Regiment near Serrig. The following are specific effects of the weather on:

(a) Personnel:

(1) Friendly: Although operating in the cold of a thawing winter, the personnel involved did not appear to be adversely affected collectively by the weather and the rugged terrain. It cannot be documented whether this was due to the limited previous contact on the continent, successes of adjacent units, the surge brought on by the thought of a nearing victory or some other factor.

(2) Enemy: Initial observation was limited by the fog. Near Serrig, the fog lifted prior to the establishment of a bridgehead by the 301st, and the enemy observation and fire was devastating. In the south, much of the much of the 302d was across before the fog lifted and there was no advantage for the Germans. The steep far bank and house-shaped pillboxes provided good observation posts and positions for snipers. "No one could have expected that the Americans would attack across this steep country, but they

1. After-action Report, January 1945. Headquarters, 94th Infantry Division, 1 February 1945.

2. Byrnes, LT Laurence G. (editor), History of the 94th Infantry Division in World War II, p. 297.

did."(3)

(b) Landscape: Rugged and partly forested. The snow, rain and cold had little effect on the defenders but drastically slowed the attacker as the ground thawed to mud. "In breaking the Siegfried Switch with the 94th Infantry Division, the battalion (704th Tank Destroyer) fought some of its hardest battles under the worst conditions encountered in its entire history. Dragons teeth, pillboxes, minefields, artillery fire, and tanks combined with the natural obstacles of rain, snow and ice made almost inconceivable odds that were broken through, and the enemy manning those obstacles was completely routed."(4) "The country enclosed within the Triangle was rugged and heavily wooded somewhat resembling the Ardennes, and contained few roads suitable for the offensive use of armored columns."(5)

(1) Friendly: Having fought through the Saar - Moselle Triangle during January and early February, elements of the 94th Division had gained an appreciation for the rugged terrain. Although constrained by poor, narrow roads, a steep incline to the Saar River and sheer cliffs on the far banks, the advance proceeded remarkably close to the planned sequence.

(2) Enemy: The advantage was totally to the Germans. Sniper, pillboxes and other prepared positions were well-placed and manned. However, the complete lack of early warning systems effectively negated this advantage until the fog lifted.

(c) Rivers: The relatively early thaw caused the Saar and small local tributaries to be at or over seasonal high water marks and turbulent. The flow rate of the Saar was about seven miles per hour. "Just prior to the breakthrough attack, a thaw occurred that turned the whole sector into a morass and also as the snow melted exposed the thousands of mines that littered the area. Every possible type of mine was present -- Topf mines, glass mines, Teller mines and Shu-mines literally blanketed the hills"(6)

(d) Roads: Relatively speaking, a good network existed in both sectors. The narrowness was new to many American planners and drivers, giving a slight advantage to the Germans.

3. Ibid., p. 300.

4. 704th Tank Destroyer History, p. 13.

5. The XXth Corps: Its History and Service in WWII, p. 208.

6. 704th Tank Destroyer History, p. 16.

(e) Manmade Features (wire, rail, roads, etc.): Perhaps the most significant manmade feature that impacted on the timing of the crossing was the small narrow main street of Kastel. The engineer boat convoy was delayed because the motor trains of the 302d Inf battalion became misoriented and had to turn around in the town.⁽⁷⁾ One engineer truck was ditched and overturned in the process. Manmade features which severely hampered the initial assault, particularly in Serrig, were the bunkers and pillboxes which were constructed to look like and blend with the surrounding houses.⁽⁸⁾ Devastating fire was brought on the 301st Infantry until 13 of these were neutralized on the night of 22 Feb 45.

(f) Tactical Considerations:

(1) Visual Observation: Had the assault boats arrived on time or earlier, the Staadt crossing would have been a less hurried operation and an advantage may have been gained at by optimum use of the dense ground fog. The arrival of the boats around breakfast, coupled with the increased resonance of the fog, alerted the Germans. However, without the fog (which lasted until mid-morning) it is highly likely that the crossing would have resulted in significantly higher casualties. This natural concealment was a decided advantage. Even had the boats been on time and smoke been used, an artificial screen would have caused the Germans to come to a higher state of readiness much more quickly than did the fog.

(2) Night Operations: Although not planned for the Saar River crossing by the 94th Infantry Division, night movement was necessary in order for the units to be in position to cross at 220400 Feb 45. On the night of the 22d, as was stated earlier, night operations were necessary to clear the town of Serrig.

(3) River Crossings: The high waters and the seven mile per hour current in the Saar River were complications, as previously discussed. This was alleviated mid-morning on the 22d when the 22 horsepower boats arrived.⁽⁹⁾ Once serviced, these new motors made the sorties more frequent and insured that soldiers arriving on the far bank were more fit to fight. Far shore operations in the Staadt area required hand cutting of wire obstacles under enemy machine gun fire. "The obstacles were too close to the river to permit the safe use of bangalore torpedoes."⁽¹⁰⁾ "The

7. Ibid., p. 293.

8. Ibid., pp. 289, 295, 299.

9. Ibid., p. 297.

10. Ibid., p. 294.

dense fog made the operation possible. Two hundred boats were used, but only 27 were still operable by the time the infantry was across."(11)

(4) Movement by Air: One air reconnaissance was performed. Limited information was gained due to the rugged terrain and initial lack of motorized or mechanized German equipment. No other air activity was used in this operation.

(5) Influence of Weather on Weapons Systems: Snow still covered many enemy mine fields in or near tank ditches.(12) These were only discovered as they damaged equipment and killed men.

(6) Use of Special Munitions: As the fog began to lift at mid-morning on the 22d, the 301st Regimental Commander near Staadt called for smoke to continue screening the crossing. However, once the smoke was lifted to facilitate continuation of the attack, the Germans were able to concentrate fires (up to 20mm) on the eastern bank of the Saar and the troops of the 301st in Serrig.(13) No gas munitions were used.

(7) Surveillance and Target Acquisition Means: At the division level and below, there was less than one day to plan for the crossing. (The 1/301st had only six hours.) The "warning order" to the 94th came from their liaison officer to XX Corps, Lieutenant H.J. Donners, who called the division headquarters in Freudenburg at about 211400 Feb 45 with the message that "back here [Corps CP] they're talking about a river crossing and if it's made, we'll [94th ID] be making it."(14) This late notification, coupled with the heavy fog and the fact that 2/3 or more of the time available for planning occurred during the hours of darkness, limited opportunities for reconnaissance and observation to "as the situation developed." Normal lead time for staff preparation of such an operation had been eaten up by the previous three days' fighting to get to the river line. Terrain and time afforded the Germans the opportunity to prepare the far shore; however, much of their sector was defended by the 41st Volksgrenadiers, who were not experienced combat veterans. In spite of the limited time, the 94th Reconnaissance Troop was able to locate the enemy in Krutweiler and report that the crossing in the north would be made against a numerically

11. Ibid., p. 303.

12. Ibid., p. 283.

13. Ibid., p. 263.

14. Ibid., p. 298.

superior force. In this part of the Siegfried Line "the enemy had observation, prepared fields of fire, ideal artillery positions, underground communications and massive pillboxes, all protected by minefields and wire. (15) Target acquisition was initially difficult due to the well-camouflaged and dug-in nature of the German positions.

(8) Mobility: In addition to the restricted mobility for motorized/mechanized equipment, the rugged terrain and poor roads made it extremely difficult to get the assault boats to the river. In most cases, they had to be manhandled down 300 yards or more of steep road.

(9) Troop Morale: Although low at the river and in the mud, the general morale of the 94th Inf Div was high due to the successes achieved during the last four weeks in getting to the Saar River.

2. Terrain (OCCOA)

(a) Observation and fire. Initially the rugged terrain limited surveillance and restricted movement. This favored the Germans until the 302d Regiment crossed in the south and began a flanking movement. As discussed earlier, the fact that the Germans did not expect the Americans, or anyone else, to attack over such difficult terrain gave the element of surprise to the 94th Division. Once the 302d Regiment gained the high ground opposite Staadt, the terrain advantage turned to the 94th Division.

(b) Influence of concealment and cover on plans of action.

(1) Enemy: At this point in the war it is difficult to estimate the influence anything had on local commanders. Initially it appears the Germans made good use of the high cliffs on the far banks and the well-prepared, disguised and camouflaged pillboxes. However, as soon as the resistance from the 94th seemed sincere, many prisoners were taken with little or no "toe-to-toe" fighting. The will of the German soldier appeared to be in serious question, causing many of his commanders' efforts to be in vain.

(2) Friendly: The fog was probably the single biggest contributor as concealment facilitating the actions of the 94th. On a clear day, with good German positions and fields of observation and fire, and with assault boats forcing the crossing in what would have been near light, "the plan" would have been in serious jeopardy, especially in Serrig.

(c) Obstacles: "...when the Germans were

15. Ibid., p. 285.

constructing the Siegfried Line in 1939 - 1940, they built a switch line along the base of the Triangle. This switch line was built to a depth of two kilometers with pillboxes, dragon's teeth, and anti-tank ditches guarding the rugged terrain. The tactical purpose of the defenses was to exhaust the attackers so that, even if they succeeded in smashing through the crust of the obstacles, they could be counterattacked and wiped out."(16)

(d) Key Terrain:

(1) In area of operations:

(a) Enemy (east side of Saar River): The Saar-Moselle Triangle south of the communications center at Trier was decidedly key terrain as it was the last place to stop the Allies prior to Trier which would then open up the Moselle Valley to the Rhine and break the Siegfried Line at Coblenz. The Germans made use of the defensible terrain to contain the small bridgehead of the 94th until 24 Feb 45 when "three armored infantry battalions crossed the river under withering fire" and by the 25th had freed the expansion of the bridgehead. (17)

(b) Friendly (west side of Saar River): "The terrain west of the river was open or at best thinly wooded and under direct enemy observation. The low marshy ground confined almost all movements to the roads leading to the river. These roads were heavily zeroed in by the artillery batteries in the Siegfried forts."(18)

(2) Potential influence on OPLANS:

(a) Enemy: Retention of a stronghold in the Saar-Moselle Triangle forced the Germans to commit elements of the 11th Panzer Division to that front. The crossing of the Saar by the 94th denied any possibility of the 11th PZ being released to secure Metz for a spring offensive.(19) The crossing of the Saar itself succeeded in diverting German reserves so well that the "enemy threw into action his only remaining battalion of armor available in the sector."(20)

(b) Friendly: As previously discussed,

- 16. XXth Corps, p.238.
- 17. Ibid., p. 263.
- 18. Ibid., p. 262.
- 19. Ibid., p. 243.
- 20. Ibid., p. 265.

reduction of the Saar - Moselle Triangle and crossing the Saar River were critical to the US plan to seize Trier. One has to look at the need to secure Trier's communications center and an opening to the Rhine to appreciate the importance of the crossing by the 94th Division. This bridgehead permitted the 10th Armored Division to cross and conduct the visibly important assault to the northeast.

(e) Avenues of Approach:

(1) Best avenues for American forces: There were no best avenues. As has been indicated, the roads were few, poor and well targeted. The fact that they were the only roads available, made the decision less difficult.

(2) Enemy assumptions: As was stated earlier, the Germans could not believe the Americans were attacking down a hill, across a river and up steep cliffs.

(3) Criteria analysis for moving force (US):

(a) Favorable observation, fields of fire, cover and concealment: Everything favored the defender, except the fog. Without it the inevitable crossing would be much more costly.

(b) Avoidance of obstacles: Could not be done by the 94th so they had to cross the river, fight the pillboxes and assault the hills. No mention of the words easy or fun in that sentence.

(c) Utilization of key terrain: This was probably not done as well by the Germans as it could have been. One must keep in mind that the 416th had just been beaten out of the Saar - Moselle Triangle in a week of heavy fighting and was manned with many new (some very young and some very old), inexperienced replacements.

(d) Adequacy of maneuver space: Not an issue as previously discussed. Only an option for light infantry until the bridgehead was secured and the armor assault forces could be pushed across.

(e) Ease of movement: In winter, going down muddy roads, crossing a seven mile-per-hour river and climbing steep hills, there is no such thing as ease of movement -- even without enemy fire.

(5) Relationship of weather and terrain: The fog was the smoke screen that allowed the 94th to overcome severe terrain and weather obstacles. Without it, this chapter would be much longer.

B. Comparison of Opposing Forces Combat Effectiveness

1. Strength and Composition

(a) The numerical strengths of the opposing forces could not be accurately determined from available sources.

(b) The strengths in weapons systems, fighting vehicles and other key tactical equipment could not be accurately determined from available sources.

(c) The unit identifications of the forces involved were as follows: (21)

(1) 94th Infantry Division (as of 0400 19 Feb 45) --

(a) 301st Infantry Regiment [attached troops: Company B, 778th Tank Battalion; Company B, 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion (Motorized)]

(b) 302d Infantry Regiment [attached troops: 5th Ranger Battalion (detached prior to 22 Feb 45 river crossing); Battery C, 465th AAA Battalion (SP); Company B (reinforced), 748th Tank Battalion; one platoon from Company D, 778th Tank Battalion; one platoon from Company C, 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion (Mtz)]

(c) 376th Infantry Regiment (crossed the Saar with the 10th Armored Division) [attached troops: Company A, 778th Tank Battalion; Company C (-), 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion (Mtz); 919th FA Battalion]

(d) Division Artillery: 301st, 356th, and 390th FA Battalions; [attached troops: 465th AAA Battalion (SP) (-)]

(e) Division Troops:

(1) 778th Tank Battalion (less Company C): Company A attached to 376th Infantry; Company B attached to 301st Infantry; 3d Platoon, Company D attached to 94th Recon Troop.

(2) Company B (reinforced), 748th Tank Battalion: attached to 302d Infantry.

(3) 94th Recon Troop [attached troops: Battery D, 465th AAA Battalion (SP); 3d Platoon, Company D, 778th Tank Battalion; Defense Platoon, Headquarters Company, 94th Infantry Division]

21. 94th ID After Action Report (AAR) for February 1945, p. 3.

(4) 319th Engineers: Supporting infantry regiments.

(5) Company B, 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion (Motorized): attached to 301st Infantry.

(6) Company C, 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion (Motorized): 1st Platoon attached to 302d Infantry; remainder of company attached to 376th Infantry.

(7) 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion (less Co C): Supporting infantry regiments.

(8) 774th Tank Destroyer Battalion

(9) 319th Medical Battalion

(2) Enemy Forces: The German forces in the area of the Saar crossing were under the control of LXXXII Corps (part of Army Group G) and consisted of the depleted 256th Volksgrenadier Division and 2/3 of the weak 416th Infantry Division. (22)

(d) Comparison of the relative strength of the opposing forces: The 94th Infantry Division was a full strength infantry division, with armor and tank destroyer attachments. The 94th was strong in artillery and suffered from no ammunition shortages. On the German side, the 256th Volksgrenadier Division consisted of three grenadier regiments of two battalions each and one full artillery regiment organized into four composite battalions. Including the divisional troops, the ratio of actual to authorized strength was 2:3. The 256th was considered to have poor armament and the corps summary rates, it as conditionally suitable for defensive action. (23) The bunkers in the Wiltigen - Mettlach sector were held by two battalions of Volkstrum, whose combat value the LXXXII Corps knew had proved to be extremely low. (24) It would be fair to deduce that the 416th Infantry Division was configured as the 256th VGD. At this time also, while the Germans had enough tubes of artillery, they were suffering from a severe ammunition shortage. For this reason, their indirect fire support was limited. The after-action report of the 11th Panzer Division states that as early as 18 Jan 45 the 416th ID was seriously battered, confused, and hardly fit for further resistance. (25)

22. Von Ingelheim, Engagements Fought by the LXXXII Corps, p. 20

23. Ibid., p. 15.

24. Ibid., p. 22.

25. Von Wertersheim, The 11th Panzer Division in the Rhineland, p. 5.

(e) Supporting units (air, engineer, special purpose forces, etc.): The 94th ID was provided direct support by the 5th Field Artillery Group of XXth Corps Artillery. The 5th FA Gp, consisting of both 105mm and 155mm guns, was assigned the mission of reinforcing the 94th Divarty. The 195th FA Gp was in general support of both the 94th ID and 3d Cavalry. (26) Engineer support for the 94th ID was provided by the 135th Engineer Combat Battalion (DS) and Headquarters, 1139th Engineer Group (which assisted in obtaining crossing equipment). (27) Lastly, air support was provided by P-47 fighter bombers, which operated under division control throughout the month of February. (28) On the German side, the 416th ID was supported by numerous Hetzer mobile 75mm anti-tank guns. These guns were used to reestablish contact with an enveloped group of pillboxes at Tettingen. German artillery was rendered nearly ineffective by the massive counterfire of US forces. There was no air support for German troops during the Saar River crossing phase of this battle.

(f) On 19 Feb 45, the division jumped off with its three regiments abreast. Each regiment attacked with two battalions up and one back. The division lost its 376th Regiment, through attachment to the 10th AD, at 191800A Feb. The 94th Recon Troop was likewise attached to the 10th AD at 191800A Feb. (29)

(g) Committed forces: The 94th ID crossed the Saar with the 302d Infantry Regiment going across at Taben and the 301st going across at Staadt. The 302d crossed with its first battalion leading. Company C led the first battalion assault followed by companies A and B, which passed through Company C to secure the battalion's objectives. The 301st crossed with the third battalion leading. Company I crossed first, followed in order by companies K and L. (30) The Volkstraum, who initially manned the westwall bunkers by themselves, were in the afternoon supported by the infantry of the approaching 416th Infantry Division. At this point in the battle, the LXXXII had no reserve. (31) A note from Generalleutnant Pflieger sums up the strength of the 416th ID,

26. Byrnes, History of the 94th Division, p. 286.

27. Ibid.

28. 94th ID AAR, p. 6.

29. Ibid., p. 4.

30. Byrnes, pp. 287 - 289 and 293 - 298.

31. Von Ingelheim, pp. 26 - 27

"Thereafter, the division had no more compact infantry reserves. On about 18 January, the 11th Panzer Division took over the sector attacked. It was not subordinated to me, therefore I cannot furnish any report on its encampments or orders from Corps headquarters; however, the division had to put at the disposal of the PZ division within 14 days five of their six battalions. And then they came back in remnants....I can no longer describe the further battles west and east of the SAAR without additional data. Even if the division fought east of the Saar only with foreign infantry it is still true to say that there reached the eastern bank of the Rhine only mere elements of the supply services, of the signal battalions, and of the divisional staffs."(32)

(h) Reinforcements (strength and composition): Once across the Saar, the initial battalions were reinforced by the remainder of the infantry regiments and supporting units, either by assault boats or as soon as bridging was in place to allow for vehicular movement by armored and other vehicles. The 10th AD was eventually committed through the 94th ID. It was on 24 Feb 45 that LXXXII Corps began to get reinforcements, when Army assigned to the heavily engaged divisions, one SS battalion, then the service school (one assault battalion), three reserve battalions of military area XII, and two regimental staffs.(33) It was not until 27 February that the Germans got more reinforcements with the 256 VGD being assigned units of the 2d Mountain Division (136th Regiment). On 29 February the 416 ID was assigned the 137th Mountain Infantry Regiment. The 2d Mountain Division consisted of two regiments of three battalions each and one artillery regiment of four battalions. The division's training was poor and its infantry was newly formed from supply and other noncombat units. The corps rated the division as only conditionally suitable for defensive action. Actual to authorized combat strength was 1:2.(34) One battalion from the 11th Panzer Division, which did not have enough fuel to move from the area when ordered, also was utilized by the Germans. This unit, II Bn, 11th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, was available on the 22d.(35)

(5) Intelligence:

(a) Assets available to the opposing forces: On the American side, there was aerial photography, prisoner of war interrogations, captured maps, the XX Corps' 3d Cavalry

32. The Rhineland Campaign of the 416th ID, p. 10.

33. Von Ingelheim, p.28.

34. Ibid., p. 29.

35. Byrnes, p. 300.

Group and the 94th ID's reconnaissance troop. Lower level units brought in information gathered by patrols and constant limited objective attacks. Information from the German side is not available.

(b) Major sources of intelligence: Judging from the accounts of the XXth Corps, the two main sources of intelligence at Corps level were expert prisoner interrogation, which enabled the corps to develop the enemy order of battle, and excellent aerial photography and reconnaissance. At the division level, in addition to those mentioned, patrolling was an important source of intelligence, as were liaison spotter planes. These were used to spot targets, especially enemy artillery, and to fly commanders over critical areas of the battlefield(36) Still another source of intelligence used by the division when available, was the 7th FA Observation Battalion, attached to XXth Corps.(37)

(c) Intelligence was disseminated in the form of sand table constructions of enemy positions. These constructions were distributed down to battalion level. The sandtables were available prior to the attacks made by the 94th ID on 19 Feb 45. Some of this information had to be timely, as commanders were flown over critical areas in liaison planes, to physically inspect the terrain on which they would later have to fight. The proof as to whether the intelligence was effective rests on the fact that the 94th ID, when ordered to make a full scale attack, crushed the German units west of the Saar River. There is no mention in the applicable readings of intelligence being available and not being used. In fact, all indications are that intelligence was gathered and passed down the chain to commanders who innately imputed this information into their decision-making process. On the German side, the state of intelligence gathering is evident from this quote by Generalleutnant von Wiertersheim: "The tanks, committed through the gap thus created, ran into a German antitank ditch covered with snow and had considerable losses on account of the stoppage thus caused. The local units employed there until then had not been able to give the tanks exact information about the course of the ditch, presumably owing to the fact that these units were jumbled up and some had been thrown into the fighting only very recently. Thus the basic elements of any raid-- suddenness and surprise were lost....The actual course of the anti-tank ditch...was first discovered from an American captured map!(38)

36. The XXth Corps, Its History and Service in WWII p. 253.

37. Byrnes, p. 286.

38. Von Wiertersheim, p. 10.

(d) Integration of intelligence information into the operational plans of the opposing forces: The best way to illustrate the American side of this issue is through the following quote: "General Maloney developed his plan as a logical extension of the earlier probing attacks, this time aimed at a complete rupture of the Orscholz switch and early capture of the Hogback ridge. Colonel Hagerty's 301st Infantry was to make the main effort from Sinz to reach the crest of the ridge and the highway leading northwest from Munzingen. Colonel McClure's 376th Infantry was to protect the 301st's left flank while Colonel Johnson's 302d Infantry on the division's right was to strike almost due east from the Kampholz woods to the crest of the Hogback ridge and then roll up the forward line of pillboxes further east. An elaborate program of division and corps artillery was designed to isolate the battlefield, but to guard surprise by beginning only as the infantry moved to attack.(39) The Americans had the German fortifications of the Saar-Moselle Triangle pinpointed down to the individual pillboxes making up the fortified systems. The Germans make no mention of any intelligence operation similar to what the Americans had. This, and the fact that the Germans were disorganized and constantly being moved into and out of an area, leads to the conclusion that they did not use intelligence in formulating their operational plans to the extent the Americans were able to do so.

(e) Intelligence influence upon the battle: The major influence on the battle was the advantage given to the American commanders. Using the information available, they were able to know when and where to hit the enemy and how best to do it. The American plans were greatly influenced by knowing where the enemy was and in what strength. This had a tremendous impact in the 94th ID's attack 19 - 22 Feb, when the division crushed the Germans west of the Saar river. Finally, the decision to make the hasty crossing of the Saar was itself predicated upon knowing the enemy order of battle and taking advantage of the disorganization and confusion caused by the 94th ID's drive to the Saar. XXth Corps knew that the river could be crossed before the enemy could recover sufficiently to defend against such.(40)

6. Doctrine and Training:

(a) Doctrines of the opposing forces:

(1) Doctrinal literature at the time of the operation states the following: "When the enemy is already in

39. Chapter VII, The Saar Moselle Triangle, p. 126

40. The XXth Corps p. 262.

possession of a river line which cannot be turned, the crossing must be forced. Under favorable conditions a river crossing may be forced by rapid and audacious methods....In an operation involving a river crossing the actual crossing is a means, not the end sought. The immediate purpose is to get across quickly and economically and establish a bridgehead which will protect the crossing of the remainder of the command....Reconnaissance of river lines across the routes of advance is begun by staff and engineer officers at an early stage of the operation....In general, the attacker should operate on a wide front with several determined attacks at separate localities....Engineer troops must be made available early in the planning stage of the operation so that reconnaissance can be made and equipment prepared and properly disposed....The unit engineer of the senior echelon is charged with all technical preparatory measures for crossing and for the distribution of engineer troops and material, the construction and guarding of bridges, and the regulation of traffic thereon."(41) Thus, at headquarters level, the XXth Corps was in consonance with FM 100-5, June 1944, when they decided to boldly attack across the Saar River. We have to drop down to the level of the divisions within the Corps to look at a hasty river crossing. Doctrine states: "Advanced elements are crossed by such equipage as is readily available or can be improvised. The crossing must be boldly executed. It is worth taking risks to prevent the enemy organizing strong defenses. Plans should provide for the arrival of leading elements on a broad front to take advantage of any weak spots in the enemy position. In such an operation, time is of the greatest importance and detailed reconnaissance and planning must be dispensed with. Engineers are usually attached to larger units of the division in such crossings. Engineers assist in utilizing commandeered and expedient crossing means, and construct rafts for the crossing of anti-tank guns and combat vehicles."(42) The crossing was boldly executed. The crossing site at Taben was practically everything that a good crossing site should not be, but it was the only one available to Colonel Johnson.(43) Not only was it free of snipers but the Germans were not expected to be pressed for a crossing at that point. Additionally, it was obvious that Hocker Hill would have to be taken because of its dominating position if the 302d was to protect the south flank of the proposed bridgehead area. Despite the drawbacks, the Americans took the risks at Taben in order to get on the other side and secure the southern portion of the bridgehead site.

41. FM 100-5; Field Service Regulations; Operations, War Department, 15 June 1944. pp. 226 - 230.

42. FM 5-6, Engineer Field Manual, 1943, "Operations of Engineer Field Units," p. 87.

43. Byrnes, p. 286.

The engineers were attached from corps to the division and manned the boats that took the infantry across. However, the boats were undermanned with only two engineers instead of three.(44) "Each boat is [normally] assigned a crew of three men and a guide who remains on shore."(45) There is no record of anything being improvised to move anti-tank guns and combat vehicles across the Saar. At Staadt, Company C of the 319th Engineers replaced Company A and stretched a rope across the river to facilitate ferrying.(46) The corps and division were also acting within doctrine by attaching the engineers at the crossing site. Doctrine states: "Engineers are attached to subordinate tactical units of the division for execution of engineer tasks whenever the local tactical employment of the engineers has a controlling influence on execution of the mission. For example, engineers should be attached to leading infantry battalions for initial assault boat crossings and early construction of footbridges. Attached units should revert to division control as soon as the need for attachment to subordinate tactical units ceases in order that the division engineer may shift the resources of engineer troops and equipment to the front most essential to the success of the division. The time of the reversion is stated in orders and may take place after leading battalions of leading regiments are across or even later depending on circumstances."(47) This was done with the engineers being involved in the assault boat operation and building of rope ferrys, footbridges, etc.

(2) On the German side, a switch line was built along the base of the Saar-Moselle Triangle. This switch line was built to a depth of two kilometers with pillboxes, dragon teeth, and anti-tank ditches guarding the rugged terrain. The tactical purpose of the defenses was to exhaust the attackers so that even if they succeeded in smashing through the crust of the obstacles, they could be wiped out by a mobile reserve held back for that very purpose.(48)

(b) Established principles and patterns for employment of combat, combat support, and combat service support forces: The established principles for combat forces can be summed up by viewing the two operations in which

44. Byrnes, p. 288.

45. FM 5-6, P. 101.

46. Byrnes, p. 303.

47. FM 5-5, Engineer Field Manual, Troops and Operations, Washington, 1941, p. 250.

48. The XXth Corps p. 238.

General Walker, XXth Corps commander, employed the 94th ID. First, when the 94th ID arrived in the XXth Corps sector, General Walker told General Maloney on 12 February to begin a series of stabs into the line in strengths not to exceed one reinforced battalion. General Walker did this in part to provide the division offensive combat experience, in part to contain the Germans in the Orscholz switch and possibly draw reserves from another sector, and in part to gain a foothold in the line for later exploitation.(49) Later (around 15 February) when General Walker realized the Germans were weakening, he called for an all out attack by the 94th Division, heavily supported by corps assets. General Walker used the words "reckless abandon" in telling the 94th Division to move forward and destroy the enemy in front of it.(50) Combat support, mostly artillery, was used to wear down the enemy. Both maneuver and artillery units were greatly successful in this role. The sources make no mention of American combat service support operations. Thus, in combat and combat support, the Americans from corps down to battalion fought along established patterns -- attacks heavily supported by artillery to inflict maximum casualties on the enemy, with the goal of securing objectives necessary to continue the attack. On the German side, both the LXXXII Corps and the 11th Panzer Division strongly objected to the way they were utilized. A report from the 11th PZ Division states that the following experiences were confirmed:

(1) "To undertake a raid, sufficient time must be given to an armored force -- especially during the winter -- for thorough reconnaissance of the terrain, of the habits and position of the enemy.

(2) "The infantry of an armored division must not be allowed to bleed to death in unfavorable terrain without its tanks. If the initiative cannot be gained at one point it must be gained at another place, without set boundaries -- which are blinders to a command such as that of an armored division; which operates like a cavalry command."(51) The 11th PZ blamed their misuse and greatly weakened condition on the LXXXII Corps.(52)

For their part, the LXXXII Corps repeated demanded that the Orscholz oblique defensive line be abandoned and the 415th ID retired to Wiltince-Mettlack section of the Westwall. The purpose of this was to have battlewise troops within the

49. The Saar Moselle Triangle, p. 117.

50. XXth Corps, p. 255.

51. Von Weitersheim, p. 10.

52. Ibid., p. 9.

Westwall in the event the enemy launched a breakthrough offensive. These suggestions by corps headquarters were not approved. On 21 February, the fears of the corps materialized when the American forces arrived at the Saar together with, if not before, the German troops.(53)

(c) Published doctrine and previous fighting practices: As was pointed out earlier, the hasty river crossing was in consonance with published doctrine. It is also important to note that the 94th ID began its combat life in this battle. Before being committed in the Saar-Moselle Triangle, the 94th was used in the containment of the Germans in the Breton ports; however, at that time they were not authorized to conduct offensive operations.(54) On the German side, the issue of how the units fought prior to this battle is a moot one, as they were so low on fuel, ammunition and equipment, plus the poor quality of the men being received, forced them to adopt their tactics to the reality of the situation. Only the 11th PZ, in its initial actions against the 94th ID was anywhere near its proper strength in men and equipment. In their case, lack of fuel prevented them from operating according to doctrine: "A large part of the tank regiment remained on the east bank of the Saar from the very beginning, for want of fuel..."(55)

(d) Changes in actual tactics: The Americans fought according to their doctrine and established tactics. On the German side, the changes in tactics were reduced use of artillery due to severe ammunition shortages in all calibers.(56) In addition, the Germans had no reserve left and therefore could not plan counterattacks to regain the initiative.(57)

(e) Level of training of forces involved: Prior to leaving the US, the 94th ID did well in the eight operations of Phase III training conducted in the Second Army maneuver area in central Tennessee, despite having to give up 1500 personnel as overseas replacements just before the exercise began. Post maneuver training was conducted with all types of problems presented and a liberal ammunition allowance for small arms available. Extended rifle platoon exercises were held for up to six days at a time, and expert infantryman tests were conducted.(58) As stated before, when landed in

53. Von Ingelheim, p. 52

54. Byrnes, p. 46

55. Von Wartersheim, pp. 5 - 6.

56. Von Ingelheim, pp. 48, 53.

57. Ibid., p. 27.

58. Byrnes, p. 26 - 27.

France, the 94th ID took part in containment of the German units in the Breton ports, although they were not authorized to conduct offensive operations. However, they underwent battle indoctrination by constantly running patrols and practicing infantry-tank coordination, etc. (59) Thus, when the division arrived in the Saar area, it was considered to have properly trained soldiers, NCO's and officers. In addition to adequate individual training, the 94th had conducted large scale maneuver and combined arms training. The limited objective attacks prior to 15 February also helped the 94th to "bloody itself." On the German side, there was a different story. The 256th VGD was activated in the fall of 1944 and had fought in the Vosages under the 90th AK before going to the Saar. It was rated only conditionally suitable for defensive action. (60) The 416th ID seems initially to have been properly trained, but as losses continued to mount they could be made up only from administrative and supply units. The Volkstraum were considered to have a very low combat value, thus it may be deduced that they were poorly trained and suffered from numerous other handicaps. (61)

(f) Use of combined arms and weapons systems: In the American Army, the task organization (depicted earlier) placed the supporting units in an attached status or in support of the infantry regiments. Units were then further broken down and cross-attached. The Americans did use combined arms and often sent tanks and tank destroyers to support infantry actions. On the German side, the lack of fuel made the use of combined arms a far more haphazard undertaking. Many of the German armored vehicles only had enough fuel to move from one firing position to another, and even these simple movements were sometimes beyond their capabilities.

(g) Overall combat effectiveness: As should be obvious, the American combat power was strong and growing stronger. Their effectiveness overall was high. The Germans were in bad shape prior to the 94th ID's 17 February attack. By the time the 94th ID reached the Saar, the 256th VGD and 416th ID had been destroyed as divisional units. Only remnants of these two divisions and two Volkstraum battalions could be mustered by the Germans to counter the 94th's assault across the Saar.

59. Ibid., p. 46.

60. Von Ingelheim, p. 19.

61. Ibid., p. 22.

7. Condition and Morale:

(a) The background for this section has already been developed and presented in previous portions of this paper. Very generally, in review, the German 416th Panzer Grenadier and Volks Grenadier Divisions were composed of few experienced officer and NCO's and filled with very young and very old men with little or no current combat experience. Besides affecting the units tactical capability directly, these personnel had a significant impact on unit cohesiveness, general military discipline and the individual soldier's dedication to solving small but immediate problems. Maximum advantage was not taken of the rugged terrain, swift river current and other favorable defensive factors. The German's (individual and unit) dedication at this point in the war was far short of that of the Japanese or even that of their own soldiers earlier. Seeing the Western Front collapse around them and hearing rumors of the Russian Front did little to bolster their morale. Having just been pushed out of the Saar-Moselle Triangle, the German soldiers were not well prepared and the defenses were far from completely occupied when the 301st and 302d Infantry struck across the Saar. The isolating feature of pillboxes and snipers further degraded the German team effort. Once the pillboxes were identified they could be attacked individually and as was shown in Serrig, were very vulnerable to the ingenuity of men of Company K, 1st Bn. 301st Infantry. These men under the leadership of Corporal Petri, offered surrender to the pillboxes one by one, systematically destroying those that refused. They netted eleven pillboxes and 247 prisoners. (62)

(b) The analysis of the 94th Division shows a much different unit. While not long-term combat veterans, the 94th had just been involved in the clearing of the Saar-Moselle Triangle. Whether their successes were due to the general collapse of the West Wall or to their own fighting, the 94th was advancing eastward and had been given a mission to cross a river and lead the way to the Rhine. Confidence, morale and general esprit de Corps were high. Although statements are made that General Patton was not pleased with the performance of General Maloney and the 94th, the evidence from late January through the crossing of the Saar River indicates the 94th accomplished its mission. Perhaps Patton's chastisements were only examples of his characteristic bravado to inspire men and units to greater things more quickly.

(c) Perhaps the biggest single contrast between the two forces was the willingness of the American soldiers to exercise initiative in a moment of crisis. Corporal Petri is but one example during the preparation for the crossing, the crossing, and the expansion of the bridgehead of corporals, privates, lieutenants, and sergeants taking charge in a moment

of decision to find a way to success. While this was before Vince Lombardi's time of fame, it was his generation and visibly demonstrates what the will to win can do.

C. Courses of Action

1. The 94th Division was ordered to cross the Saar River near Serrig and Taben after the Corps Commander, General Walker, recommended to General Patton that the XX Corps cross the Saar and seize Trier. General Walker received permission from Patton on 21 February. The 10th Armored Division was assigned the mission of seizing a crossing at Ocken north of Saarburg and capturing Trier. A regiment from the 94th Division was attached to establish the initial bridgehead for the 10th Armored Division.

2. The 94th Division, minus one regiment, was ordered to cross the river near Serrig and Taben. The crossing by the 94th was intended to divert the German's attention; tie up sizeable enemy forces south of Saarburg; and establish a bridgehead. The bridgehead by the 94th Division was also intended to be a springboard for future operations to enable the XXth Corps to capture the entire Saar Basin.

3. The 10th Armored Division ran into much difficulty at the onset. The 94th Division, on the other hand, experienced success in their surprise crossing of the Saar. The crossing commenced in the early morning hours of 22 February and by nightfall the Division was securely established on the far bank. They were helped by the dense fog which lingered in the crossing area during the morning.

4. The 94th Division received a "warning order" of the intended crossing by their liaison officer, Lieutenant H. J. Donners, who notified the division headquarters at 211400 February. He overheard the Corps staff talking about a proposed crossing and using his initiative called his headquarters. Thus, the division's planning occurred entirely at night, as H-Hour was set at 220400 February. The choices for the 94th Division commander, General Maloney, were virtually dictated by the present positions of his units and the timing of the operation. He had no alternative except to make the crossing at the sites selected. The actual order (in essence a "fragmentary order") given by XXth Corps was received in the early evening of 21 February.

IV. The Crossing.

A. Pre-crossing Disposition of Forces.

1. On the night of 21 February, the units of the 94th Division were still consolidating their positions taken from the Germans during the recent action to clear the Saar-Moselle Triangle. The Division had fought a good battle and had made significant gains. Division soldiers felt that they would be able to "belly-up to the Saar, outpost the river and enjoy a well earned rest." (1)

2. The units closed on the river with the 301st Infantry Regiment in the north, occupying positions roughly from just north of Krutweiler, in the north, along the boundary with the 10th Armored Division, to Serrig in the south. Within this sector, the 2d Battalion was on the left flank (north) and the 3d Battalion was on the right, "garrisoning both Kastel and Staadt." (2)

3. The 302d Infantry Regiment's sector extended south from Serrig (the boundary with the 301st Infantry) to just south of Taben, where it shared a boundary to Oberleuken with the 5th Ranger Battalion. Within this area, the 3d Battalion occupied the right (north) flank and the 1st Battalion the left. The Division Headquarters was at Freudenburg. (3)

4. The enemy defending the eastern shore of the Saar River was a hodge-podge of units. In addition to the local defense battalions occupying that section of the West Wall, General Hahm, the LXXXII Corps Commander was able to supplement the defense with elements of the 256th Volks Grenadier Division which had escaped across the Saar just ahead of the American advance. Hahm was additionally helped when his southern boundary was shifted northward, roughly to the east end of the Orscholz Switch, thereby freeing one regiment of the 416th Infantry Division that had not been involved in the previous battle. (4) Hahm had also managed to press into action one of the panzer grenadier battalions of the 11th Panzer Division which had not yet left the area. (5)

1. Byrnes, Laurence G. (editor). History of the 94th Infantry Division in World War II, p. 283.

2. Ibid. p. 285.

3. Ibid. p. 282

4. MacDonald, The Last Offensive, p. 130.

5. The Capture of the Saar-Moselle Triangle, XX Corps, p. 14.

5. The enemy units were deployed along the fortifications and pillboxes which comprised the West Wall. These defensive positions were planned to be mutually supporting and ran to a depth of three kilometers at some points. However, at one point, the defenses thinned out considerably. "In the vicinity of Taben and Serrig, where the eastern bank of the Saar rose in a sheer precipice from the water's edge the Germans considered the addition of man-made defenses to be practically superfluous." (6) Still, the Germans "boasted that the position was impregnable." (7)

6. As mentioned earlier, the 94th Division had not expected to be ordered to continue the attack without a break. The idea of immediately pressing the attack across the Saar "seemed fantastic." (8) The Division's losses (over one thousand casualties) were considered severe. (9) During the period 19-20 February, the 94th had participated in the XX Corps offensive to clear the Saar-Moselle Triangle. In heavy fighting along the base of the Triangle, the division had cleared the area east to the banks of the Saar. The towns of Taben, Rodt, Hamm, Kastel, Staat, Trassen, and Kencitingetin had just been seized from the Germans on the 21st along with 347 prisoners of war. (10) Nevertheless, as soon as the idea of continuing the attack was planted (at about 1400 hours that day) the Division Commander, Major General Maloney, immediately gave instructions to begin preparation for an assault crossing of the Saar. Reconnaissance and resupply had to begin at once if the 94th was to continue the attack across the river.

7. An aerial reconnaissance of the Saar River was ordered from Merzig to Trier and the two regimental commanders sent patrols to "investigate the west bank of the river for possible crossing sites and likely observation posts." (11) The 301st Infantry patrolled in the area around Staadt and Krutweiler. A crossing site near Staadt was selected because the area around Krutweiler had not been completely cleared.

8. Meanwhile, the 302d Infantry was also searching

6. Ibid. pp. 12-13.

7. Byrnes, op.cit., p. 286.

8. Ibid., p. 283.

9. MacDonald, op.cit., p 129.

10. After-Action Report, 94th Infantry Division, 1 January - 9 May 1945, p. 21.

11. Byrnes, op.cit p. 203.

for likely crossing sites. A possible site at Hamm was rejected because there was no road leading to the river and enemy defenses on the opposite shore were already in place. Instead, the 302d selected a site south of the assigned bridgehead area in the town of Taben. "Taben was practically everything a good crossing site should not be, but it was the only one available ... in all likelihood, the enemy would not expect an American crossing at this point." (12)

9. Little current information on enemy activities in the sector was known. To be sure, the earlier exhaustive analysis of the West Wall defenses was helpful in determining enemy defensive positions, but the size and strength of the defending units was not known. The units which would ultimately defend the crossing included both battle weary troops and fresh but unseasoned soldiers as well.

10. Due to the lack of detailed intelligence concerning the enemy's strength and locations, it is difficult to compare the relative combat power of the opposing forces. While the 94th Division had suffered significant losses in the previous days' operations, morale "among the troops ran high." (13)

11. The enemy, on the other hand, had just been routed from the Triangle and morale among its soldiers was low. Few units were capable or willing to put up a determined defense. All of the German defenders had tasted defeat at the hands of the Americans with the possible exception of the enemy pillbox battalions.

12. Corps Field Order No. 11, directed the Division to continue the attack across the Saar. The Division, as part of the XX Corps offensive to seize Trier, was to attack across the Saar between Saarburg and Hamm on the night of 21-22 February to establish a bridgehead on the eastern shore and be prepared to continue the attack. (14) The Division's initial objective was a chain of hills about six thousand yards east of Serrig.

13. Following receipt of the Corps order, the Division issued its order. The 301st Infantry in the north was to attack east at 0400 hours on 22 February to establish a bridgehead from Serrig north to a point opposite Krutweiler, and continue to advance to seize its portion of the Division's initial objectives. Additionally, the unit was to maintain contact with the 10th Armored Division on the left (north) and

12. Ibid. p. 285.

13. Ibid, p. 283.

14. Ibid.

the 302d Infantry on the right.

14. The 302d was also ordered to attack at 0400 hours to secure a bridgehead from Serrig south to the river bend at Hamm and to continue to push east to secure that portion of the Division's initial objective in its zone. The regiment was also charged to maintain contact with the 301st Infantry on its left (north) and the 5th Ranger Battalion on its right. (15)

15. According to an amendment to the XX Corps Field Order, the 5th Rangers would pass through the 302d, once the bridgehead had been established, and infiltrate through the enemy to seize and hold the high ground southwest of Zerf in order to secure the road network in that area. These roads would be used by the tanks of the 10th Armored Division to advance on Trier. Additionally, seizure of this road network would prevent the enemy from bringing up reinforcements to counterattack the 94th. (16)

16. The XX Corps order also specified the attachments of tank, anti-aircraft, and tank destroyer units to the Division for the attack, as well as providing a company from the 81st Chemical Motor Battalion. (17)

17. The Division's 319th Engineers were given the mission of ferrying the initial assault waves across the Saar in boats, and they immediately set about to coordinate with XX Corps for the necessary assets. After several delays, sixty-four boats were obtained to support the Division's crossing.

18. In addition to the three battalions of artillery assigned to the 94th Division Artillery, the Corps Artillery's 5th FA Group was assigned the mission of reinforcing the fires of the 94th. The 195th FA Group, whose mission was general support, also ranged the 94th area of operations. Firepower available to the 94th for the crossing therefore included calibers from 105mm up to 240mm.

19. The scene was set for the crossing.

15. Ibid., p. 284.

16. Capture of the Saar-Moselle, p. 14

17. Byrnes, op.cit. pp. 283-284.

E. THE CROSSING.

1. The night of 21-22 February was spent in rapidly developing and disseminating plans for the crossing and in assembling troops and equipment at the assembly areas: Taben and Kastel. Although the various accounts do not address weather conditions that night, moonrise must have occurred early and provided illumination, as it did the following night. (18)

2. The 22d of February began with troops of C Company, 1-302 Infantry in the town of Taben and the entire 3d Battalion, 301st Infantry in Kastel. Between the hours of midnight and 0400, the temperature must have continued to drop, causing first a ground mist, then heavy fog. Since the crossing was scheduled to begin at 0400 hours, the troops were probably aroused by 0300 hours for weapons checks, feeding, and preparation for movement.

3. XX Corps had provided 59 assault boats (each weighing 1000 pounds) and five motor boats. Since the original division plan called for three companies to cross simultaneously, the boats were probably divided as follows: Twenty to twenty-five assault boats to the 302nd Infantry Regiment, providing a capability to cross 200-250 men (one company) at Taben; the 301st Infantry Regiment was given 34-35 assault boats providing a capability to cross 340-350 men plus 5 motor boats for use in crossing the second and subsequent waves once the far bank was secured. Doctrine called for 34 assault boat to cross an infantry battalion with two rifle companies abreast. (2)

4. At 0500 hours, the first six boats arrived at Taben and were manhandled down to the river's edge. Simultaneously, a battalion field train from the 302d Infantry Regiment erroneously entered Kastel, lost perhaps due to fog. While attempting to turn the convoy in the narrow and irregular streets, the engineer convoy with the Corps assault boats arrived.

5. The heavy fog both aided and hindered the crossing operations. At Taben the fog had dispersed the engineer convoy, causing only six boats to arrive, these an hour late. But fog also concealed their movement to the river's edge, the crossing of the river, and the attack on the German pillboxes. At Kastel and Staadt, the fog caused a traffic jam (at Kastel), the missed movement times of the two assaulting companies, and a piecemeal attack.

18. The 94th Infantry Division, p. 298.

19. FM 5-6, 1943, p. 121, Para. 93.

6. At Taben, which was to be the divisional supporting attack, the crossing began at 0650 hours, and the 1st Battalion, 302d Infantry was across by 1200 hours. The rapid clearing of an area at least 100 yards downstream and 250 yards upstream secured the far bank. Thus, the subsequent lifting of the fog within the river valley at 1000 hours only served to expedite the crossing of the remainder of the 1st Battalion and the 3d Battalion.

7. At Staadt, which was to be the 94th Division's main attack, the fog caused the initial assault companies (I and K) to cross lines of march to the river bank, thereby reversing the planned positions for the crossing and attack. Additionally, not enough boats were available to simultaneously cross both units. At 0750 hours, I Company had crossed and was scattered over a wide frontage on the far bank near the town of Serrig. The unit failed to rapidly leave the river due to barbed wire entanglements, which had been partially submerged due to local flooding. I Company came under fire as the defenders blindly fired into the fog. By 1000 hours when the fog lifted, the 301st Infantry had only captured a few pillboxes and had not concentrated its efforts on the far bank in a decisive manner. As more boats were available (assault, then motor boats) they were employed in a piecemeal manner.

8. A crucial error occurred when the unit failed to continuously employ smoke to replace the shielding effects of the lifting fog, thereby allowing enemy artillery to accurately locate 301st units and crossing sites. Subsequent use of smoke could not make up for this error. By 1500 hours, the 301st finally had Companies I and K across but had to suspend operations until dark due to unacceptable casualties of men and boats.

9. This respite allowed the division staff to put the status of operations in proper perspective. The 302d Infantry had, by now advanced north along the river bank, taking bunkers one at a time by flank attack. They had employed artillery and had killed approximately 125 Germans, to include an undermanned enemy company moving to reinforce Serrig or to counterattack the 301st. The topography prevented enemy artillery from interdicting the crossing site and two battalions (8 companies) crossed. Hocker Hill, key terrain for securing the crossing site, was under friendly control.

10. On the other hand, the 301st Infantry which had received the bulk of the division's support, sustained high casualties, and were stalled near the river bank after crossing only 2 companies. The decision to reinforce success (i.e. redesignate the 302d as the main effort) was obvious to the division staff as was the subsequent XX Corps decision to cross the 10th Armored Divisions at Taben due to the failure

to secure a crossing further north.

11. By 1900 hours, darkness had fallen and A Company, 1-302d Infantry entered Serrig, relieving pressure on the 301st, and convincing the German forces that Taben must be retaken. An hour later, the 3rd Platoon of C Company, 1-302d repulsed an enemy counterattack east of Serrig and L Company, 3-301st Infantry had crossed at Staadt, and I and K Companies started to clear the northern portion of Serrig. Moonrise provided illumination which aided the crossing of the remainder of the 3rd Battalion, 302d Infantry at Taben as well as aiding the operations of the 3-301st. By 0400 hours, on the morning of the second day, the 3-301st Infantry had cleared the bunkers in Serrig and had taken 247 prisoners.

12. Completely missing from the 94th Infantry Division history is any mention of the use of tactical air units to suppress enemy indirect fire on the crossing sites or to provide intelligence on enemy counterattacks. The February 1945 Division After Action Report credited the field artillery liaison aircraft with being an important source of intelligence. The F-47 fighter bombers which operated under division control during the month of February were used to conduct an armed reconnaissance north of the crossing site, to Trier. Although 5 tanks and 10 motor transports were reported destroyed this day, one cannot help but wonder if their use in direct support of the crossing at Staadt would not have proved to be the decisive factor for the 301st Infantry.

CHRONOLOGY

21 FEB 45

- 1400 Hrs- Division Liaison Officer at XX Corps HQ advises of potential river crossing operation.
- 1804 Hrs- Division receives XX Corps Field Order #11.
- 2000 Hrs- Division plans made and approved.
- 2200 Hrs- 1/302 Inf received regiment order.

22 FEB 45 (Taben Crossing)

- 0001 Hrs- C/1-302 at Taben.
- 0500 Hrs- First 6 boats arrive.
- 0605 Hrs- First boat in water.
- 0650 Hrs- Crossing begins: Company C clears area at least 100 yard downstream and 250 yards upstream of site. Companies A, B, and D cross. Capture 73 prisoners.
- 1000 Hrs- Fog lifts.
- 1200 Hrs- A and B/1-302 begin advance toward Serrig.
- 1300 Hrs- 3-302d assembled in Taben and begin crossing. 1-302d advances north along river bank. Takes bunkers on bank. Supported by artillery, kill about 125 Germans. Advance 5000 yards. 3-302 cross and climb Hocker Hill.
- 1900 Hrs- A Company enters Serrig.
- 2000 Hrs- 3/C/1-302 repulse enemy counterattack east of Serrig.
- 2200 Hrs- All of 3-302d across.

22 FEB 45 (Staadt Crossing)

- 0500 Hrs- Bn trains from 302d erroneously enters Kastel.
- 0615 Hrs- I and K Companies leave Kastel for Staadt with boats.
- 0750 Hrs- I Company scattered over wide frontage.
- 0825 Hrs- Request motor boats.
- 0930 Hrs- Enemy artillery and mortar fire on Staadt.
- 1140 Hrs- 1st and 2nd plts of K Company cross.
- 1200 Hrs- New boats with motors arrive.
- 1455 Hrs- Remainder of K, Bn Cdr, and Arty L.O. cross. Smoke is lifted at crossing site. Enemy indirect fire on crossing site.
- 1700 Hrs- Attempts to cross halted until night.
- 2000 Hrs- L Company crossed with minor casualties. I and K start to clear northern portion of Serrig. Clear bunkers and take 247 prisoners.

C. Major Phases of the Battle, 23 - 24 February 1945

1. Status at close of D-Day: By nightfall on D-Day one battalion of the 301st Infantry Regiment and two battalions of the 302d Infantry Regiment were firmly established on the far bank and half of Serrig was cleared and secured. (20) The 3d Battalion, 301st Inf, crossing at Staadt, had by 0400 on 23 February cleared the riverfront and taken 19 houses in Serrig; the battalion was pushing south. (21) From the 302d Regiment, 1st Battalion had two companies, A and B, pushing into Serrig from the south and Company C in defensive positions on high ground to the east of the town; 3d Battalion completed crossing by 2200 hours and the companies formed a perimeter defense on Hocker Hill during the night. (22)

2. 23 February, D + 1:

a. At dawn, C Company, 1st/302d was hit by an undesignated German assault which was repulsed after an hour of heavy fighting. This action highlighted difficulties in combat support during the early phases of the operation. Due to the fluid nature of the situation, identification of friendly forward traces was impossible. This led to the establishment of a No Fire Line, by Division Artillery, east of Serrig; the result, in addition to C Company's problems, was lack of artillery or tank direct fire support for the infantry as they cleared Serrig. (23)

b. In the town, the 3d/301st continued fighting through the night to clear the area from the river to the railroad tracks; patrols established contact between that unit and the 1st/302d, who had fought through from the south. In a coordinated action the two units searched and cleared the remainder of the town. Despite constant indirect fire from the Germans, Serrig was cleared as of 1820 hours; the battalions then assumed defensive positions for the night. (24)

c. At the Taben crossing site, 2d Battalion, 302d commenced movement shortly after midnight and despite harassing artillery fire, was completely across by 0655 hours. (25) Given the mission to clear the river road to Serrig

20. XX Corps Operations Report, The Capture of the Saar-Moselle Triangle and Trier, p. 14.

21. History of the 94th Infantry Division in World War II, p. 299

22. Ibid., p. 291.

23. Ibid., p. 291.

24. Ibid., p. 302.

25. Ibid., p. 301.

and the cliffs paralleling it, the commander opted to move the Battalion along the ridge road while sending a heavy patrol on the river road. The patrol had little difficulty negotiating the numerous but mostly empty pillboxes enroute, and late in the afternoon met a patrol from 1/302d moving south from Serrig. The road was clear and passable other than a huge crater that required subsequent engineer work. The main elements were not so fortunate. As the lead company neared the terraced vineyards on the cliffs opposite the Hamm bend, it was hit by heavy machinegun and rifle fire from emplaced elements of the II Battalion, 11th Panzergrenadiers and stopped completely. The units strung out behind the lead elements, in restricted and open terrain, were subjected to the German's effective use of mortars. Unable to bypass or maneuver in the restricted space, all attempts to break the bottleneck with patrols during the night proved unsuccessful. (26)

d. Back at the 301st crossing site at Staadt, the action took a decided turn for the worse as intense artillery fire became increasingly deadly. The 2d Battalion/301st Infantry's attempt to cross in darkness succeeded in getting only two platoons of Company G across before heavy losses in the battalion and amongst the engineers caused a standstill. After daylight, just as the crossing was to be restarted, the site was hit by a heavy concentration resulting in heavy casualties, to include the battalion commander. (27) At approximately 1200 hours, prior to another attempt to start crossing, the battalion received orders to terminate operations and to move back to Freudenberg to become the division reserve. (28) The site, although closed to major crossings, was used for ferrying operations to resupply the 3/301st and to evacuate wounded from Serrig. As the Germans' interest in the site decreased, the remaining elements of the 3/301st were moved across the night of the 23d. (29)

e. The major combat service support problem during this initial phase was clearly the supply of assault boats, a shortage exacerbated by the Germans effective use of indirect fire. More than two hundred boats were used during the operation of which only 27 were in operation when the infantry completed the crossing of the Saar river. (30)

26. Ibid., p. 302.

27. Ibid., p. 303.

28. Ibid., p. 304.

29. Ibid., p. 305.

30. Ibid., p. 303.

f. With the comparative ease witnessed in crossing at Taben, the 301st Regimental Commander recommended attaching his 1st Battalion to the 302d; this was approved and the 1/301st was ordered to cross as soon as possible.(31) The unit started crossing at 1730 hours, moving then to relieve the 3/302d on Hocker Hill; the relief was completed as planned that night and the 3/302d moved down from Hocker Hill in preparation for movement to Serrig by way of the river road.(32)

g. One other action of note on D+1 occurred early that morning (23d). The 5th Ranger Battalion (20 officers and 378 enlisted men), having crossed the Saar late on D-Day, filed through the lines of the 3/302d on Hocker Hill at approximately 0200 hours. From there they moved to take high ground southwest of Zerf.(33)

h. As noted previously, combat support, specifically artillery fire, was of limited use during this day's operations; the infantry received no support in action around Serrig nor is there any indication that fires were called in the action at the Hamm bend bottleneck. Extreme difficulty in executing counterbattery fire was noted as due to incomplete fixes on gun locations by the infantry. As liaison planes became involved in spotting, counterbattery fires improved; the Germans' highly mobile rocket batteries continued to cause trouble.(34)

3. 24 February, D+2:

a. Commencing at 0400 hours the last infantry battalion, 2/301st, crossed at Taben. The unit, severely depleted by the attempted crossing at Staadt the previous day, consisted of a composite company (F/G) of 70 soldiers and E Company of approximately 50 men.(35) The battalion was ordered to occupy high ground to the south of 1/301st on Hocker Hill, hence becoming the division's right flank unit. As the composite company moved to the high ground to the right of the 1/301st, they encountered a strongpoint which they were unable to overcome; they withdrew slightly and set up positions.(36) Company E, moving up on the composite company's left, also

31. Ibid., p. 306.

32. Ibid., p. 307.

33. XX Corps Operations Report, p. 14.

34. Byrnes, p. 308.

35. Ibid., p. 309.

36. Ibid., p. 309.

encountered an enemy strongpoint. Following reinforcement by 22 men of the battalion Antitank Platoon, and a short but effective artillery concentration, the unit took the position and captured 25 prisoners. The company then established defensive positions tied in with the 1/301st and their sister F/G Company. (37)

b. That morning the 3/301st assaulted to seize the high ground overlooking Serrig to the north. Advance was steady throughout the day, although slower going in the heavily fortified area along the left flank (the river side), and the high ground was occupied by the late afternoon. (38)

c. The 3/302d who had been relieved on Hocker Hill by the 1/301st during the night found the ridge road still blocked by the bottleneck of the 2/302d. The commander decided to use the river road to reach Serrig despite the dangers posed by the Germans in position on the cliffs. In broad daylight the battalion moved the entire route without receiving any fire, arriving in Serrig at 1130 hours. (39)

d. Given the crisscrossing of regimental boundaries that had occurred, the division reorganized crossattachments as of 1100 hours: The 301st Regiment consisted of its own 3d Battalion with two platoons from G Company of the 2d Battalion and the 1st and 3d battalions of the 302d; the 302d Regiment consisted of its own 2d Battalion and the 1st and 2d (-) battalions of the 301st. (40)

e. The division was supplied one M2 treadway bridge which was designated to be employed at Taben. The 135th Combat Engineers, assisted by Company A of the 319th Engineers, encountered a number of difficulties but the construction, starting at 0230 hours, was completed by 1350 hours. The first tank across settled one of the pontoons which required extra repair efforts before the remainder of the division's tank battalion, the 78th, could pass. (41)

f. The armored column arrived in Serrig at 1800 hours, signaling the start of further operations. The 3/302d pushed out to high ground northeast of the town where just prior to the following dawn the infantry, with assistance of tanks, cleared the final pillbox. Four tanks, with security

37. Ibid., p. 311.

38. Ibid., p. 312.

39. Ibid., p. 313.

40. Ibid., p. 311.

41. Ibid., p. 313.

provided by B Company, 1/302d, moved to a position east of Serrig with the intent of assisting 2/302d in breaking the ridge road bottleneck; and A Company, 1/302d moved out to tie in with the position of C Company. The 3/301st, who recently occupied the high ground north of Serrig, was ordered to continue forward one thousand yards to the next streamline. (42)

g. That morning the 2/302d attempted to maneuver against the enemy positions on the ridge road but heavy flanking fire from machineguns proved too intense and withdrawal was necessary. With arrival of tanks in the area plans were made for a night attack. The battalion's advance was surprisingly easy that night; most of the enemy had withdrawn. The 1/302d was contacted and the 2/302d closed with them for the night. A platoon of G Company had been inadvertently left behind; they were discovered and driven from position by a German force that also retook the pillbox at the junction of the Serrig road and the Hamm bend, thereby severing the route. Just before dawn a patrol from 1/301st took the pillbox, killing seven and capturing twenty-three. (43)

h. As of the close of D+2, both regiments of the division were completely across the Saar with division troops in the process of crossing; Serrig was cleared; and a secure bridgehead from north of Serrig (1500 yards) to south of Taben (a few hundred yards) had been established with one floating treadway bridge operational in the vicinity of Taben. (44) The hasty crossing of the Saar river by the 94th Division was a success.

4. Subsequent action: In the two days that followed, the 94th continued to expand the bridgehead. Following the taking of Beurig and link-up with the 10th Armored Division, the latter assumed control of the Corps bridgehead. At that point the bridgehead was 11,000 yards wide and 5,000 yards deep, north of Ocken to south of Taben. Combat Command B of the 10th Armored Division had completed crossing at Taben on D+4 and Combat Command A started crossing at Serrig the same day. The clearing of Beurig opened the way for construction of a bridge at Saarburg which was operational by midnight on 26 February (D+4). (45) Aided by the push of the 10th Armored Division to Zerf and beyond, the 94th continued expansion of the bridgehead; on 1 March it was out to a depth of four

42. Ibid., p. 314.

43. Ibid., pp. 315 - 316.

44. XX Corps Operations Report, p. 14.

45. Byrnes, p. 326.

miles, action which also supported the drive on Trier. (46)

D. DESCRIBE THE KEY EVENTS.

1. One key strategic oversight on the part of the German defense planning staff was to play a significant role in the outcome of the battle: The defenders failed to provide adequate defensive positions along the West Wall opposite the town of Taben. The 302d Infantry Regiment seized the opportunity to cross the Saar at this point, conquered the formidable natural defenses, attacked the German defenses from the flank, and forced the crossing.

2. Initially, the 302d Infantry had been ordered to make the crossing in zone between the towns of Serrig and Hamm. The latter was rejected as a crossing site because there was no road down to the river to put the assault boats into the water. Additionally, the defenders opposite Hamm had already been spotted. Crossing at this site would be difficult at best.

3. Farther south, outside the regiments's assigned bridgehead area, was the town of Taben. Ultimately this town was selected as the 302d Infantry crossing site because it had a road which went down to the river's edge. The opposite shore; however, was another problem. The enemy bank consisted of a twelve-foot vertical retaining wall. Perched on top of the wall and paralleling the river were a highway and a railroad. Beyond these the terrain rose in a vertical rock cliff some 400 feet high.(47) "Taben was practically everything that a good crossing site should not be . . ." (48) Despite this observation and the natural obstacles, Taben was selected as the 302d's Regimental crossing site.

4. The Germans were aware that this particular point in the West Was has not been prepared with defensive positions. They considered man-made defenses to be practically superfluous because the land rose in a sheer precipice from the water's edge.(49) The region was considered impregnable: According to a statement made by German Lieutenant Colonel Albrecht Roeschen, "No one could have expected that the Americans would attack across this steep country, but they did." (50) Not only was the crossing at that point unexpected, but once discovered, little could be done to interdict it. Flat-trajectory weapons couldn't reach

47. Byrnes, History of the 94th Infantry Division in WW II, p.285.

48. Ibid.

49. The Capture of the Saar-Moselle Triangle and Trier: 15 December 1944 - 12 March 1945, XX Corps, pp. 12-13.

50. Byrnes. op.cit. p. 300.

down into the deep river gorge.(51)

5. That this crossing site would play such a key role was not anticipated by either side. Once the Germans identified the site, all they could do was to "try to interdict and harass the road leading to the crossing." (52) But this had little effect.

6. On the other hand, once the Americans realized the German dilemma with this site, forces were diverted from the crossing site at Staadt and sent across at Taben. Earlier, the 5th Rangers had used the same Taben site to cross the Saar in order to accomplish their mission deep behind enemy lines. The Americans quickly took advantage of this and used it to their best advantage.

7. This key event, the selection of the Taben crossing site, offered the Americans several advantages in addition to the ones previously mentioned. Not only were they able to move forces across in relative safety, but they were able to react to the advantage to push more soldiers across than had been previously envisioned. The Crossing at Taben carried for the Americans the element of surprise. The few guards on duty on the east bank of the Saar were overtaken with relative ease. They had clearly not expected the crossing to occur there. Additionally, once Hocker Hill had been taken, they had a commanding view of the West Wall and the countryside beyond. Indirect fire could be effectively adjusted from this position. Observation of enemy movement was also enhanced by the heights. The crossing at Taben also placed the American Forces on the relatively weak flank of the West Wall. It was easier to attack the Wall from the rear and flank than would have been otherwise possible. In short, the selection of the crossing site at Taben was a real stroke of genius for the 94th Division.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

E. STATE THE OUTCOME.

1. General: The assault crossing of the Saar River conducted by the 94th Division, 22 - 24 February, 1945, was successful. This action enabled XX Corps to exploit the success achieved in the Saar-Moselle Triangle by permitting the Corps to pass combat elements across the Saar River, through the 94th Division, and ultimately to capture the city of Trier. The success of this river crossing operation can be attributed to a combination of factors to include: terrain and weather, individual initiative, operational and organizational flexibility, and luck. The success of the 94th Division was also due, in part, to factors affecting the enemy, such as a lack of time, a feeling of isolation, and the lack of adequate reserve forces.

2. Terrain and weather: The combined effects of terrain and weather contributed an element of surprise to the 94th Division's river crossing, and limited the capability of the German forces to halt crossing operations. The Germans believed that the natural obstacles (the width of the river and the steep cliffs) in the area between Serrig and Taben were formidable by themselves and therefore, did not construct the Siegfried Line defenses in great depth in that area.(53) The poor characteristics of the Taben crossing site in particular (i.e. 12 foot retaining wall on the westbank and 400 foot vertical rock cliffs) caused the Germans to have little expectation of an American crossing at that location.(54) Fog in the river gorge at both crossing sites negated the enemy's capability to deliver accurate direct or observed fires on the crossing operations.(55) The depth of the river gorge at Taben provided crossing elements further protection from the fires of flat trajectory weapons.(56) The loud rush of the Saar River brought on by thawing snow screened the noise made by the American troops unloading boats at the crossing sites.(57) Once across the river at Taben and having achieved surprise in the crossing, American forces were able to seize and hold Hocker Hill which dominated the Taben crossing site and insured its security. The combined factors of weather and terrain worked to the advantage of the 94th Division and contributed immeasurably to the overall success of the operation.

53. XXth Corps, p. 13.

54. LTC Albrecht Roeschen, as quoted by Lt. Byrnes, p. 300.

55. Byrnes, pp. 287 & 294.

56. Roeschen, p. 300.

57. Byrnes, p. 289.

3. Individual initiative: Numerous examples of individual initiative are contained in descriptions of the river crossing. Independent actions of individual soldiers often resulted in the successful outcome of planning, execution and small engagements. Examples include: The 319th Engineer Battalion S-3 searching for and locating the boat convoy which had stopped for the night(58); the engineer battalion commander's decision to move the boat trucks closer to the water at Taben(59); using enemy prisoners to convince other Germans to surrender based on a false belief in the size of the American force(60); finding a resident of Serrig who knew the locations of all pillboxes in the area(61); and finally, the substitution of grenades for blasting caps to blow the doors off German pillboxes.(62) Without these individual acts of bravery and initiative, the 94th Division might not have achieved a successful river crossing.

4. Flexibility: Operational and organizational flexibility were major factors in the success of this operation. The XXth Corps' Field Order No. 11 assigned the 94th Division the mission of attacking "...across the Saar between Saarbury and Hamm...."(63) Taben, which became the division's main crossing site, was actually outside the assigned bridgehead area. Utilization of the Taben crossing site is a clear example of operational flexibility contributing to the ultimate success of the crossing. As the operation progressed, further flexibility to deviate from plans and to exploit success was demonstrated in decisions to shift both unit crossings and bridge construction to Taben. The 94th Division demonstrated organizational flexibility during the crossing operation by cross-attaching companies and battalions between the regiments, as dictated by the tactical situation, without a loss in operating efficiency.

5. Luck: In this river crossing, as is probably true in many military operations, the occurrence of unplanned events had a significant effect on the outcome. For example, the first squad to cross the river at Taben was fortunate while in heavy fog to find a ladder on the twelve-foot retaining wall which enabled the squad to scale the wall,

58. Ibid., p.287.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., p. 288.

61. Ibid., p. 299.

62. Ibid., p.315.

63. Byrnes, p. 283.

capture initial positions on the far bank, and ultimately led to the rapid, unopposed landing of other members of the unit.(64) On the second day of the operation, the 2d Battalion, 302d Regiment encountered the II Battalion of the 11th Panzergrenadiers while attempting to clear the ridge road. The Germans employed grenades to halt the unit's advance. As luck would have it, the Germans seemed to be equipped only with concussion grenades rather than "potato mashers" [fragmentation grenades] which would have forced the Americans from their positions. While the unit found itself in a "bottleneck" which it could not push through, nevertheless it did not have to break contact.(65) Another such example occurred at Serrig where an American platoon stumbled into and managed to capture the German artillery fire direction center for the Serrig area.(66) At Taben, trucks supporting the bridge construction were forced to approach the site along a narrow road covered by German machinegun fire. The loss of a single vehicle could have blocked the road and, for at least a time, the crossing site. While many trucks were hit, none were disabled and no drivers were injured.(67) Events such as these could certainly not have been foreseen, yet their favorable outcome had a significant effect on the success of the 94th Division.

6. Additional factors on the German side: From the German perspective, several additional factors contributed to their inability to defend against the river crossing operation of the 94th Division.

a. First, it must be remembered that German units opposing the 94th Division had been soundly defeated in the push through the Saar-Moselle Triangle and had suffered losses of some 60,000 men dead, wounded and captured.(68) The purpose of the assault crossing was to retain the American momentum and to prevent the enemy from completely manning the known main defenses of the Siegfried Line. This goal was in fact achieved as German officers later reported that the defenses were far from completely occupied.(69) The 94th Division correctly assumed that the enemy was both confused and disorganized as a result of the Saar-Moselle Triangle action.(70) Thus, time to recover and to properly prepare

64. Byrnes, p. 288.

65. Ibid., pp. 301 - 302.

66. Ibid., p. 306.

67. Ibid., p. 313.

68. MacDonald, p. 129.

69. Roeschen, p. 300.

70. Byrnes, p. 288.

positions was essential to the German defenses. Time is exactly the element which the assault river crossing took away from the Germans.

b. The second factor which affected the Germans in their defense efforts was a feeling of isolation on the battlefield. Individual German soldiers occupying pillboxes were surrounded by the same fog which hid the American forces. They were unable to observe any movement and had no clear idea of what was occurring on the battlefield. The result was unaimed fire on the sounds which the defenders heard in front of them.{71} This factor also accounts for the large number of Germans who surrendered without resistance to the initial crossing elements at Taben.

c. Finally, the Germans had no significant reserve forces in the area with which to counterattack. The II Battalion of the 11th Panzergrenadiers was committed between Taben and Serrig and achieved some success in preventing the total consolidation of the bridgehead area.{72} A single battalion available as a counterattack force was, however, totally inadequate to prevent a successful crossing of the Saar River.

71. Roeschen, p. 300.

72. Ibid.

V. ASSESSMENT OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION.

A. Immediate.

1. Clearly, the river crossing was decisive. Within a 48-hour period, two regiments (301st and 302d) had crossed the Saar River between Taben and Staadt and had secured a bridgehead one and one-half miles deep.

2. The immediate impact of this decisive river crossing was that it had facilitated the rapid crossing of elements of the 10th Armored Division which assured the capture of Trier, a key communications center in Western Germany.

3. The successful crossing of the Saar disrupted the German's near-term objectives. The Germans had expected to hold along the Saar River with limited forces (economy of force) and thus free up other units to move north and defend against the anticipated major allied offensive by General Montgomery's 21st Army.

4. The crossing of the Saar provided a significant advantage to the American forces in that: (a) one of the last formidable terrain obstacles had been overcome and (b) the last line of defense had been breached which allowed rapid advancement toward the Rhine.

5. Conversely, the Saar crossing caused a significant problem for the Germans because there were few German units available to slow the American advance toward the Rhine. The psychological damage inflicted by an enemy (U.S.) force penetrating the German home land probably was very devastating.

B. LONG-TERM.

1. The crossing of the Saar helped to accelerate the Allied push to the Rhine by creating a broader front of advance. This enlarged front restricted the German abilities to concentrate what meager reserve forces they did have in the vicinity of the main Allied effort to the North. In short, the crossing was not pivotal in the long-term but helped to accomplish or speed-up the Allied advance to the Rhine.

2. The crossing did not, in itself, place the Germans in a position from which they could not recover. However, the crossing added to the cumulative affect of: (a) Allied advances elsewhere, (b) the deteriorating morale of the German forces, and (c) the dwindling material resources (replacement personnel, ammunition and spare parts).

C. MILITARY LESSONS LEARNED.

1. The river crossing in all probability did not teach any new lessons but unquestionably reinforced old ones.

2. These same lessons are still applicable today. They are:

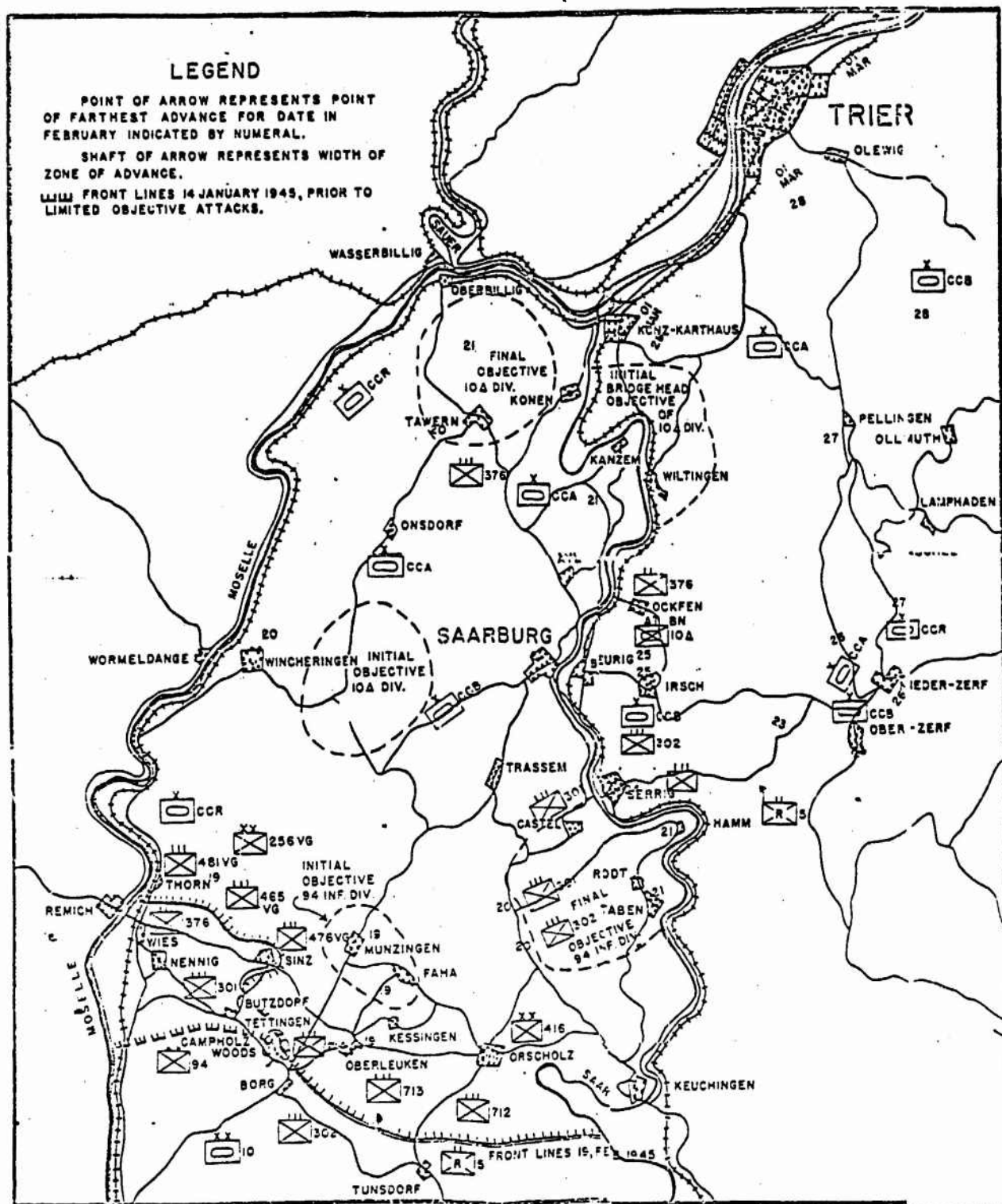
(a) Doctrine works! The 94th Infantry Division followed the "book". With less than 12 hours notice for the operation, the utility of a well-founded and tested doctrine enabled the division to plan and carry out the crossing successfully.

(b) Maintain momentum! The XX Corps took advantage of the fact that the German defenders were probably very disorganized and demoralized after their defeat and withdrawal from the Saar-Moselle Triangle. The hasty crossing maintained the momentum, took advantage of the high morale of the U.S. forces, and took advantage of German confusion and low morale.

(c) Flexibility and Initiative. It was flexibility and initiative which enabled the American force to achieve the crossing in the most unfavorable circumstances, especially in view of the lack of planning and preparation before the crossing. Particularly noteworthy is the flexibility of selecting crossing sites and the initiative taken in exploiting the successful crossings that were made, e.g., the attaching of battalions to the regiment that had successfully crossed and secured a bridgehead, vice trying to cross at a site where stiff resistance was continuing.

(d) Weather and terrain. Although the weather was not planned for, that is, the operation was not dependent on certain weather conditions, the fog which was present during certain phases of the operation was instrumental in the successful crossings. The terrain, which was not favorable to the crossing forces, was so restrictive to a crossing that the Germans actually disregarded the possibilities of the American forces to cross in those less-than-favorable terrain locations. Again, like the weather, the Americans had little latitude in their choice of crossing sites. In short, favorable weather (fog) and unfavorable terrain, had unplanned, but favorable results in this action.

XX CORPS OPERATIONS
19 FEBRUARY - 12 MARCH 1945
MAP NUMBER 1 - REDUCTION OF SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE
AND CAPTURE OF TRIER
19 FEBRUARY - 2 MARCH 1945



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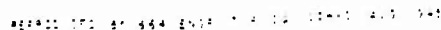
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19 FEBRUARY -- 12 MARCH 1945

19 FEBRUARY -- 12 MARCH 1945

4 MARCH - 12 MARCH 1945



22 May

To: LTC Children

- Attached is our analysis

- The group has not discussed the project concerning suitability of the SAAR crossing as an appropriate subject as the utility of Butterfield Analysis projects as a whole. Will do that Thursday or Friday during African Exercise.

- Not attached are the ULTRA MSG's that I dug out on the XX Corps/94th ID's areas of interest. I will give my pitch to the section on Thurs or Fri and after the classmates have had the opportunity to scan some of the German traffic, I'll turn them over to you. I think they should be a part of the research material of this project.

Respectfully,

Moj Hanson

22D